



SINLAHEKIN WILDLIFE AREA 2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2008 Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Management Plan http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/ that provides management direction for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area (SWA) in Okanogan County Washington. The plan identifies needs and guides activities on the area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission of “*Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife*” and its underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions.

Plans are updated annually as habitat and species conditions change, as new regulations and scientific knowledge develop, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administration of wildlife areas change.

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Updates/Changes

In the spring of 2008, a seep was discovered adjacent to the Conner Lake spillway. As a result, the lake was drained due to safety concerns for those living downstream. Throughout the remainder of 2008 WDFW engineers assessed the problem, developed a repair strategy and worked to address the water seep problem. The solution was to drive sheet piling through the center of the spillway to keep the water behind the known leak. After some final additions to the structure and new braces and fasteners added to the water control structure, Conner Lake is ready to be inundated once again.

Completed and submitted a grant proposal for fuels reduction and prescribed burning on 2,000 acres on the Sinlahekin to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) under the State Lands Restoration (SLR) category with a budget of nearly \$778,000. The proposal ranked number 1 out of 21 proposals submitted. The project area includes all WDFW property west of Sinlahekin Road from Cecile Creek to Blue Lake. The goal of this project is to eliminate the threat of a catastrophic wildfire within the Sinlahekin Valley by reducing fuels loads, restructuring fuels and reintroducing fire by prescribed burning and to restore fire dependent habitat for associated wildlife species.

Received a \$75,000 grant through the Natural Resource and Conservation Service, Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) for timber stand improvement, i.e., fuels reduction on 220 acres west of Sinlahekin road from near headquarters to near Sinlahekin Creek Road. This grant integrates with the before-mentioned WWRP grant in trying to restore fire dependent habitat.

Collaborative work continued with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on finalizing the Sinlahekin Stewardship Agreement whereby BLM lands that are part of the Sinlahekin will be managed by WDFW with any potential income to be used by WDFW toward management of the same BLM lands.

Received confirmation, via DNA testing, that there are 2 species of freshwater mussels known as "Floaters" in Sinlahekin Creek. Specifically the two species are California Floater (*Anodonta californiensis*), a Federal Candidate species, and Western Floater (*Anodonta kennerlyi*). Of further note is that the nearest genetically related population of California Floaters is in Lincoln County, in a small stream called Lords' Creek a tributary of Crab Creek located southeast of Harrington, Washington. Additionally there is another freshwater mussel species found in Sinlahekin Creek, the Western Pearlshell (*Margaritifera falcata*).

The majority of the SWA trail was completed from headquarters to Hunters Camp, about two miles south of Blue Lake. This included the installation of two reader boards west of Blue Lake. The trail was also digitized along with numerous other components such as parking areas, specific trail markers (ADA, horse, hikers, etc.), restrooms, viewing blinds, etc.

The wildlife area hosted Evergreen State College (ESC) instructors, Dylan Fischer and Carri LeRoy with their Forest Ecology and Wetland Ecology classes respectively. Subjects of interest included: *The relationship between gall sps. abundance and avian abundance*; *Setting up and documenting protocols for historical and project-based photomonitoring*; and *Invertebrate*

abundance within snag communities in both riparian and upland sites. Also hosted Thomas Otto and Blake Westman of ESC who studied the effects (or lack-of) fire upon the landscape and cataloged/identified local lichen communities.



Juniper Hairstreak - Caitlin photo

A contingent of the Washington Butterfly Association found one previously undocumented butterfly on the SWA – the Juniper Hairstreak (*Mitoura siva barryi*) a State Candidate Species; and documented, for the second time, the Artic Blue (*Agriades glandon*) which was first documented in 2006. The



Artic Blue - Caitlin photo

noteworthiness of the Arctic Blue is that it is not documented to occur below 5,000 feet elevation, but on the Sinlahekin it occurs at 2400 feet elevation. The current number of butterfly species documented on the Sinlahekin is now up to 87. With several more species which have a high probability of occurrence on the Sinlahekin.

Justin Haug, Assistant Manager, was hired in July to assist in day-to-day operations of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area complex.

The wildlife area hosted University of Washington College of Forest Resources Senior, Matthew Weintraub, as an intern/volunteer from June through September. In addition to conducting field work towards his Senior Capstone project, which involved nutritional quality and quantity of deer browse on prescribe burned areas vs. non-burned areas; he assisted with seed collection from native grasses; moved irrigation lines; performed weed control and fence repair; and monitored fire suppression activities on Chiliwist Wildlife Area.

New land acquisitions for the wildlife area included the 850-acre Horse Spring Coulee (McDaniel) property North of Aeneas Lake (see figure 1), and the 837-acre Buzzard Lake

property. Management objectives need to be developed and assessed upon site visits early in 2009.

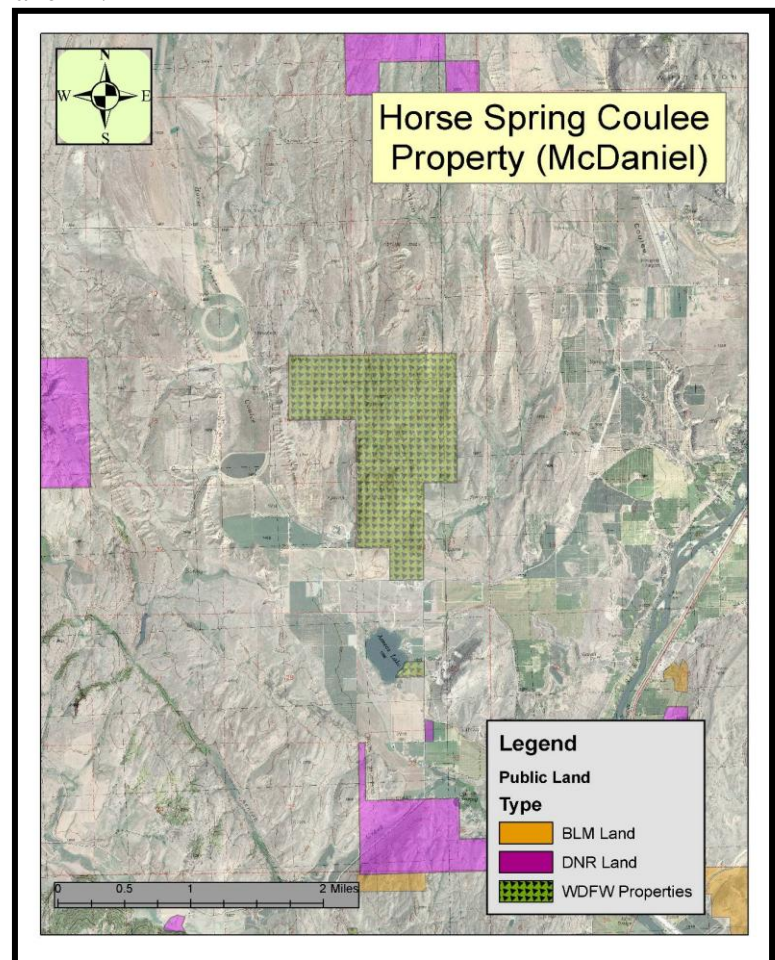


Figure 1

Continued to collect data for the Sinlahekin GIS Database, data collection includes: site specific information for fence locations and maintenance, weed location and control efforts, roads, trails, fire scars, water control structures, cultural resource sites. This effort began in 2003 with contributions from WDFW staff, interns and volunteers resulting in a substantial amount of information gathered. These data from this effort continues to be invaluable in planning and management of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

A volunteer, Lee Ellis, continued to inventory mosses on the Sinlahekin. Number of mosses identified to date are 55.

Volunteers from the Rare Plant Care & Conservation Program (Rare Care) at the University of Washington's confirmed the presence of a new yellow-lady's slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*) population on the Sinlahekin. Wildlife area manager, Dale Swedberg, also discovered a new population of yellow-lady's slipper on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, bringing the total number of known populations on the Sinlahekin to four (4). Yellow-lady's slipper is a State Threatened species.

The wildlife area participated as a cooperator in the Okanogan County Coordinated Weed Management Area (CWMA). Benefits of this program include grants for weed control, and the ability to coordinate efforts to increase weed awareness and emphasize weed prevention through collaborative efforts involving outreach and education.

New Issues

As a pre-project requirement of the both WWRP and WHIP grants, the initial development of a cultural resource survey throughout the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area has begun. The gathering of historical spatial data into a GIS system will help in speeding up the process.

An agricultural lease was transferred from Bunk Ayers to Tom Jones, a long-time agricultural leasee. Tom Jones has an existing agricultural lease and an excellent relationship with WDFW, which should make the transition seamless.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

Over 30 volunteers including master hunter participants and candidates, Washington Conservation Corps, Americorp, Okanogan County Jail trustees and an intern helped out on the wildlife area in 2008. These volunteers were responsible for various accomplishments including: repairing over 4.5 miles of fence, clipping and bagging houndstounge on over 87 acres of habitat, cleaning and installing nest boxes, facility maintenance, and assisting with day-to-day operations. All of the Master Hunter Program participants learned about projects and volunteer opportunities through the WDFW Master Hunter website. This website posting has proven to be a valuable asset.

The wildlife area controlled over 108 acres of weeds throughout the SWA covering over 382 acres of WDFW lands. Methods of weed control included: backpack spraying, ATV and truck mounted boom spraying. Major target weeds this year were goatweed, Scotch thistle, Russian thistle, and houndstongue. We continued to fallow numerous fields during the summer to suppress weeds, and planted triticale in the fall.

The Dohney Basin WHIP project was completed in the spring of 2008 with the planting of over 2000 water birch seedlings and red osier dogwood cuttings.



Tonasket Americorp Crew and seasonal WDFW employee Clark Topping

Status Report of 2008 Performance Measures

Key performance measures are identified each year to monitor progress and identify any issues that might interfere with planned priority activities. This information will be used to delete, add or alter priority strategies for 2009.

The SWA performance measures for 2009 included:

2008 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2009 Related Activity/ Comments
Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract	Completed	
Renew agricultural leases and grazing leases expiring on or before December 31, 2008	Completed - One AG permit was transferred and paperwork re-worked.	Permit paperwork was completed and will be submitted for signatures.

Complete Fire Regime Condition Classification (FRCC) mapping	Not done	Will continue to work on this as time permits
In coordination with Lands program staff, negotiate new agreement with DNR for use of the Highlands Fire Camp Site.	Not done	This will be completed in early 2009
Prepare and implement a fuels treatment project in area logged winter of 2003-04 in preparation for coordinated fuels treatment and prescribed burn with USFS	Discussions were held with USFS regarding use of portions of the SWA as part of their fuels treatment and logging which needs to be completed before an Rx burn can happen	Continue to work with USFS to facilitate getting fuels treatment completed so Rx burn can take place ASAP
Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary.	Not done	No funds available to survey boundary
Build, rebuild or repair a minimum of 10 miles of fence.	Partially Completed	Repairs were made on over 4.5 miles of fence.
Complete the Connor Lake to Forde Lake and Forde Lake to Blue Lake trails development projects	Okanogan Chapter of The Backcountry Horsemen (BCH) spent 2 weekends clearing trail on approximately 4 miles of trail.	Finished laying out and mapping with GPS the Conner Lake to Blue Lake trail. Installed interpretive signs; need to finalize, print and install interpretive sign content as well as trail head sign content.
Develop protocol and procedures to facilitate implementation of prescribed burns.	Partially complete need to coordinate with Lands Division Staff	Will continue to update plans in 2009
Complete installation of reader boards at all 7 entrances to the SWA.	Completed	
Map with GPS and add to GIS all weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included in the SWA GIS project.	Many weed infestations were mapped with GPS and entered into the GIS project to create maps	This effort will be ongoing from year to year as new weed infestations are found.
Locate by gridding and map, with GPS and GIS, all class B designate weed, e.g., Dalmatian toadflax, Russian	GIS map consistently updated throughout 2008; Russian knapweed infestations need to be delineated onto the GIS	Efforts will continue in 2009

knapweed and other weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included in the SWA GIS project. Grid for weeds on 640 acres minimum	project map. Over 380 acres were thoroughly covered but not surveyed using a grid system.	
Complete Doheny WHIP project	The project was completed in the spring of 2008.	
Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan	Plans reviewed and updated, but not complete (fire management)	Completion of plans will occur as time permits, e.g., species lists, weed mgmt plan
Complete performance evaluations	Completed	
Complete layers on SWA GIS project including fence, fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.	New layers were created by and many layers refined by assistant manager Justin Haug.	This effort will continue thru 2009 and will be updated as information become available and desired.
Visit all known Dalmatian toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice and initiate appropriate treatment.	Completed	
Stewardship inspection of Greg and Carol James' Conservation Easement	Undone – Inadequate time	Rescheduled to be completed in 2009
Complete National Fire Management Plan grant from USFWS for Sinlahekin Fuels Management and Planning	Completed Fuels management and treatment plan	

Complete the self-guided tour of the Sinlahekin.	Completed – Needs to be put on the web need final authorization from WSU and Okanogan County Historical Society to use their photos	Place pdf or jpg on the agency website
Rebuild and repair a minimum of 5 miles of fence	Incomplete – rebuilt or repaired just over 4.5 miles of fence.	Continue to rebuild/replace fence throughout 2009
Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts	They were used throughout the summer	They will continue to be used throughout 2009
Work with private, county, state and federal land managers to promote use of prescribed fire, in a coordinated effort on all lands, to improve wildlife habitat, i.e., North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council	The North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council Steering Committee met 3 times in 2008 to pursue efforts toward facilitating the use of Rx fire in North Central Washington.	Work in this area will be continue in 2009

New Strategies

None were identified

2009 Performance Measures

The 2009 performance measures for the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Complete the displays for the trails overlooking Blue Lake
- 2) Implement the WWRP and WHIP grants regarding fuels reduction and prescribed burning
- 3) Identify a minimum of 5 miles of fence and rebuild and repair
- 4) Renew grazing leases and agricultural leases expiring on or before December 31, 2009
- 5) Organize fencing supplies and built structures to better house various equipment/supplies
- 6) Grid for weeds on 640 acres minimum
- 7) Meet requirements of Federal Aid contract
- 8) Look for funding to produce new Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Maps
- 9) Seek funding for a complete fire history analysis of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area
- 10) Survey and/or mark/sign a minimum of 10 miles of SWA boundary
- 11) Locate by gridding (see #7) and map, with GPS and GIS, all class B designate weed, e.g., Dalmatian toadflax, Russian knapweed and other weed infestations on the SWA, such that a layer depicting a map of each weed species is included in the SWA GIS project

- 12) Complete and/or review and update plans including WA plan, weed plan, and fire management plan
- 13) Complete performance evaluations
- 14) Complete and or update layers on SWA GIS project including fence, fence features, artificial nest structures, roads, culverts, campsites, toilets, signs, reader boards, power poles.
- 15) Visit all known Dalmatian toadflax and Russian knapweed sites at least twice to monitor and initiate appropriate treatment.
- 16) Stewardship inspection of Greg and Carol James' Conservation Easement need to be completed
- 17) Complete self-guided tour project by acquiring permission to use photos from WSU and Okanogan County Historical Society and putting tour documents on the agency website
- 18) Use Okanogan County Jail Trustees for weed control and fence maintenance efforts as well as volunteers, master hunter participants, Americorp groups, and others willing to help in the wildlife area.
- 19) Work with private, county, state and federal land managers to promote use of prescribed fire, in a coordinated effort on all lands, to improve wildlife habitat, i.e., North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council
- 20) Apply for at least one grant or other funding opportunities consistent with planned priorities to supplement funding
- 21) Visit both the Horse Spring Coulee and Buzzard Lake properties to assess management objectives, issues and begin planning.

Citizens Advisory Group Input

An East Okanogan County Citizens Advisory Group meeting was held on February 26, 2009 to review Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island, Chiliwist and Scotch Creek Management Plans, management progress and address any new issues or input on existing issues. The attendance was disappointingly low with only 5 people attending in addition to 4 WDFW representatives. Those in attendance included representatives from The Back Country Horsemen, Oroville Sports Club, Oroville-Tonasket Irrigation District, and 2 private citizens interested in the management of the Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island and Chiliwist Wildlife Areas.

There were no new input/issues provided or raised.

Other comments/issues received specific to the SWA:

There were no other comments/issues received specific to the SWA.



Conner Lake: Photo by Justin Haug

Want to see the full plan?

Go to -

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife
_areas/management_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/)

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